

THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

The worker is a serf to this petty creditor and overlord, who in addition often subjects him to unfair and brutal treatment. The worst kind of torture has been administered, as many eye-witnesses have related, which makes sorry reading in propaganda pamphlets. Coolies are punished by fines and blows; their correspondence is brutally censored; they are cut off from their families and communes. Misery and brutality lead to wholesale desertions and suicides. Europeans may plead excuse in the effect of the climate upon them, and that misunderstandings are the result of ignorance of the country and its people, and of the inebriating effect of unlimited power—nevertheless the coolie is the sufferer. The inadequacy of police protection on these distant plantations, as well as the prevalence of theft among the Annamites, has led to the planters' meting out justice with an arbitrary hand. In the case of deserters punishment has been particularly inhuman.

Part of the coolies' misery is due to their physical condition. The majority of workers are in poor health when they arrive. Agents get mostly the worst elements, and native officials are glad to pack off the local dregs. Most contracts are signed because of a famine, since physical depletion alone makes the worker willing to migrate. And permanent under-nourishment leaves little resistance to disease. Medical examinations, despite governmental efforts, have not prevented the embarkation of sick coolies. In addition, the moral isolation of the South augments their poor health. Nor have they proper care on the plantations. The exploitation of virgin soil, especially the deforestation of redlands, is extremely unhealthy work. Malaria has been one of the worst local diseases. Quinine was distributed but in

sufficient quantities, and often the coolies failed to take it, not appreciating its value. Beriberi, a malady to which the Annainites are prone, has increased with a poor rice diet. Cooking was left to the coolies themselves, but they were not given the proper facilities. Drinking-water in many cases was bad. Ritual burial was not assured to those who died. The families were not even notified so that they could perform the rites so important in Annamite belief. In 1927 the mortality on Southern plantations was from four to five times as great as Cochin-Giffia's average death-rate. It was naturally worst among those workers who had not become acclimatized, and on the redland plantations where the supervisors were newcomers who know nothing about local conditions.

Labour represented 75 per cent of a big plantation's expenses. In 1924 ^a recruiting agent received 16 piastres per coolie. Passage cost